

CHRISTIAN RESIGNATION

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A SERMON

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“Not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

Matthew 26:39

THE apostle Paul, writing concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, says, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.” He who, as God, knew all things, had to learn obedience in the time of His humiliation. He, who is in Himself Wisdom Incarnate, did Himself condescend to enter the school of suffering—there to learn that important lesson of the Christian life—obedience to the will of God.

And here, in Gethsemane's garden, you can see the Divine Scholar going forth to practice His lesson. He had been all His lifetime learning it, and now He has to learn it for the last time in His agony and bloody sweat, and in His terrible death upon the cross. Now is He to discover the utmost depths of suffering and to attain to the height of the knowledge of obedience.

See how well He has learned His lesson. Note how complete and ripe a scholar He is. He has attained to the very highest class in that school and in the immediate prospect of death, can say to His Father, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

The object of this discourse is to commend to you the blessed example of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as God the Holy Spirit shall help me, to urge you to be made like unto your glorious Head, and yourselves to learn, by all the daily providences with which God is pleased to surround you, this lesson of resignation to the will of God, and of making an entire surrender to Him.

I have been struck lately, in reading works by some writers who belong to the Romish church, with the marvelous love which they have towards the Lord Jesus Christ. I did think, at one time, that it could not be possible for any to be saved in that church, but often, after I have risen from reading the books of those holy men, and have felt myself to be quite a dwarf by their side, I have said, “Yes, despite their errors, these men must have been taught of the Holy Spirit. Notwithstanding all the evils of which they have drunk so deeply, I am quite certain that they must have had fellowship with Jesus, or else they could not have written as they did.” Such writers are few and far between, but still, there is a remnant according to the election of grace even in the midst of that apostate church.

Looking at a book by one of them, the other day, I met with this remarkable expression, “Shall that body, which has a thorn-crowned Head, have delicate, pain-fearing members? God forbid!” That remark went straight to my heart at once. I thought how often the children of God shun pain, reproach, and rebuke, and think it to be a strange thing when some fiery trial happens to them. If they would but remember that their Head had to sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground, and that their Head was crowned with thorns, it would not seem strange to them that the members of His mystical body also have to suffer.

If Christ had been some delicate person, if our glorious Head had been reposing upon the soft pillow of ease, then might we, who are the members of His church, have expected to go through this world with joy and comfort. But if He must be bathed in His own blood, if the thorns must pierce His temples, if His lips must be parched, and if His mouth must be dried up like a furnace—shall we escape suffering and agony?

Is Christ to have a head of brass and hands of gold? Is His head to be as if it glowed in the furnace and are not we to glow in the furnace, too? Must He pass through seas of suffering and shall we—

*“Be carried to the skies,
On flowery beds of ease”?*

Ah, no! We must be conformed unto our Lord in His humiliation if we would be made like Him also in His glory.

So, brethren and sisters, I have to discourse to you upon this lesson, which some of us have begun to learn, but of which as yet we know so little—this lesson of saying, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” First, let me *explain the meaning of this prayer*. Then, *urge you, by certain reasons, to make this your constant cry*. Next, *show what will be the happy effect of its being the paramount desire of your spirits*. And we will conclude with a practical inquiry—*what can bring us to this blessed condition?*

I. First, then, WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS PRAYER? “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

I shall not address myself to those Christians who are but as dwarfs, who know little about the things of the kingdom. I will speak rather to those who do business in the deep waters of communion, who know what it is to pillow their heads upon the bosom of Jesus, to walk with God as Enoch did, and to talk with Him as Abraham did.

My dear brethren, only such as you can understand this prayer in all its length and breadth. Your brother, who as yet scarcely knows the meaning of the word communion, may pray thus in some feeble measure, yet it is not to be expected that he should discern all the spiritual teaching that there is in these words of our Lord. But to you who are Christ-taught. You who have become ripe scholars in the school of Christ—to you I may speak as unto wise men—judge ye what I say.

If you and I mean this prayer, and do not use it as a mere form of words, but mean it in all its fullness, we must be prepared for this kind of experience. Sometimes, when we are in the midst of the most active service, when we are diligently serving God both with our hands and our heart, and when success is crowning all our labors, *the Lord will lay us aside*—take us right away from the vineyard and thrust us into the furnace.

Just at the very time when the church seems to need us most, and when the world’s necessities are most of all appealing to us, and when our hearts are full of love towards Christ and towards our fellow creatures—it will often happen that, just then, God will strike us down with sickness, or remove us from our sphere of activity.

But if we really mean this prayer, we must be prepared to say, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” This is not easy, for does not the Holy Spirit Himself teach us to long after active service for our Savior? Does He not, when He gives us love toward our fellow men, constrain us, as it were, to make their salvation our meat and our drink? When He is actively at work within our hearts, do we not feel as if we could not live without serving God? Do we not then feel that to labor for the Lord is our highest rest and that toil for Jesus is our sweetest pleasure? Does it not then seem most trying to our ardent spirit to be compelled to drink the cup of sickness and to be incapable of doing anything actively for God?

The preacher is seeing men converted and his ministry successful, but all of a sudden, he is compelled to cease from preaching. Or the Sunday school teacher has, by the grace of God, been the means of bringing his class into an interesting and hopeful condition—yet, just when the class needs his presence most, he is smitten down, so that he cannot go on with his work.

Ah! then it is that the spirit finds it hard to say, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” But if we adopt this prayer, this is what it means—that we should be prepared to suffer instead of to serve, and should be as willing to lie in the trenches as to scale the walls—and as willing to be laid aside in the King’s hospital as to be fighting in the midst of the rank and file of the King’s army. This is hard to flesh and blood, but we must do it if we present this petition.

If we really mean this prayer, there will be a second trial for us. Sometimes, *God will demand of us that we labor in unpropitious fields*. He will set His children to plough the rock and to cast their bread upon the waters. He will send His Ezekiel to prophesy in a valley full of dry bones and His Jonah to carry His message to Nineveh. He will give His servants strange work to do—work which seems as if it could never be successful, or bring honor either to God or to themselves.

I doubt not that there are some ministers who toil and labor with all their might, yet who see but little fruit. Far away in the dark places of heathendom, there are men who have been toiling for years, with scarcely a convert to cheer them. And here, too, in England, there are men who are preaching in all sincerity and faithfulness the Word of the Lord, yet they do not see souls converted. They know that they are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, both in them that perish and in them that are saved.

Our hearts are, I trust, so full of the Spirit prompting us to cry, like Rachel, “Give me children, or I die,” that we cannot rest content without seeing the success of our labors. Yet the Master, in effect, says to us, “No, I tell you to continue to toil for Me, though I give you no fruit for your labor. You are to keep on ploughing this rock, simply because I tell you to do it.” Ah! then, brethren, it is hard to say, “Not my will, but thine be done.” But we must say it. We must feel that we are ready to forego even the joy of harvest, and the glory of success, if God wills it.

At other times *God will remove His people from positions of honorable service, to other offices that are far inferior in the minds of men*. I think that I should feel it hard if I had to be banished from my large congregation and from my thousands of hearers, to a small village where I could only preach the Gospel to a little company of people. Yet I am sure that, if I entered fully into the spirit of our Lord’s words—“Not as I will, but as thou wilt”—I should be quite as ready to be there as to be here.

I have heard that, among the Jesuits, such is the extraordinary obedience which they are compelled to pay to their superiors that, on one occasion, there was a president of one of their colleges, who had written some of the most learned books in any language, a man of the highest talents—and the superior of the order took a freak into his head, for some reason, to send him straightaway from the country where he was to Bath, to stand there in the street for a year and sweep the crossing, and the man did it. He was compelled to do it. His vow obliged him to do anything that he was told to do.

Now, in a spiritual sense, this is hard to perform, but nevertheless, it is a Christian’s duty. We remember the saying of a good man that the angels in heaven are so completely given up to obedience to God that if there should be two works to do—ruling an empire and sweeping a crossing—neither of the two angels who might be selected to go on these two errands would have any choice in the matter, but would just leave it with their Lord to decide which part they were to fulfill.

You may, perhaps, be called from the charge of the services in a place of worship, to become one of the humblest members in another church. You may be taken from a place of much honor and put in the very lowest ranks of the army. Are you willing to submit to that kind of treatment? Your flesh and blood say, “Lord, if I may still serve in Your army, let me be a captain, or, at least, let me be a sergeant or a corporal. If I may help to draw Your chariot, let me be the leading horse, let me run first in the team, let me wear the gay ribbons.”

But God may say to you, “I have put you there in the thick of the battle, now I will place you behind. I have given you vigor and strength to fight with great success, now I will make you tarry by the stuff. I have done with you in the prominent position—now I will use you somewhere else.” But if we can only pray this prayer, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt,” we shall be ready to serve God anywhere and everywhere, so long as we know that we are doing His will.

But there is another trial which we shall all have to endure in our measure, which will prove whether we understand by this prayer what Christ meant by it. Sometimes, *in the service of Christ, we must be prepared to endure the loss of reputation, of honor, and even of character itself*. I remember, when I first came to London to preach the Word, I thought that I could bear anything for Christ. But I found myself shamefully slandered, all manner of lies were uttered concerning me, and in agony I fell on my face before God and cried unto Him.

I felt as though that was a thing I could not bear—my character was very dear to me and I could not endure to have such false things said about me. Then this thought came to me, “You must give up all for Christ, you must surrender everything for Him—character, reputation, and all that you have—and if it is the Lord’s will, you shall be reckoned the vilest of the vile, so long as you can still continue to serve Him, and your character is really pure, you need not fear. If it is your Master’s will that you shall be trampled and spit upon by all the wicked men in the world, you must simply bear it and say, ‘Not as I will, but as thou wilt.’”

And I remember how I rose, then, from my knees, and sang to myself that verse,—

*“If on my face, for Thy dear name,
Shame and reproaches be,
All hail reproach, and welcome shame.
If Thou remember me.”*

“But how hard it was,” you say, “for you to suffer the loss of character and to have evil things spoken against you falsely for Christ’s name’s sake!” And what was the reason why it was so hard? Why, it was just because I had not fully learnt how to pray this prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ—and I am afraid that I still have not completely learned it yet.

It is a very delightful thing to have even our enemies speaking well of us, to go through this world with such holiness of character that men who pour scorn upon all religion cannot find fault with us—but it is an equally glorious thing for us to be set in the pillory of shame, to be pelted by every passerby, to be the song of the drunkard, to be the by-word of the swearer, when we do not deserve it—and to endure all this for Christ’s sake. This is true heroism—this is the meaning of the prayer of our text.

Again, some of you have at times thought, “Oh, if the Master will only be pleased to open a door for me where I may be the means of doing some good! *How glad I should be if I could have either more wealth, or more influence, or more knowledge, or more talents, with which I might serve Him better!*” You have prayed about the matter and thought about it, and you have said, “If I could only get into such and such a position, how excellently should I be able to serve God!”

You have seen your Master give to some of His servants ten talents, but He has given you only one. You have gone on your knees and asked Him to be good enough to trust you with two—but He has refused it. Or you have had two and you have asked Him to let you have ten—and He has said, “No, I will give you two talents and no more.”

But you say, “Is it not a laudable desire that I should seek to do more good?” Certainly. Trade with your talents—multiply them if you can. But suppose you have no power of utterance, suppose you have no opportunities of serving God, or even suppose the sphere of your influence is limited, what then? Why, you are to say “Lord, I hoped it was Your will that I might have a wider sphere, but if it is not, although I long to serve You on a larger scale, I will be quite content to glorify You in my present narrower sphere, for I feel that here is an opportunity for the trial of my faith and resignation, and again I say, ‘Not as I will, but as thou wilt.’”

Christian men, are you prepared heartily to pray this prayer? I fear there is not a single individual amongst us who could pray it in all its fullness of meaning. Perhaps you may go as far as I have already gone, but if God should take you at your word, and say, “My will is that your wife should be smitten with a fatal illness, and like a fading lily, droop and die before your eyes, that your children should be caught up to my loving bosom in heaven, that your house should be burned with fire, that you should be left penniless—a pauper dependent on the charity of others. It is My will that you should cross the sea, that you should go to distant lands and endure unheard-of hardships. It is My will that, at last, your bones should lie bleaching on the desert sand in some foreign clime.”

Are you willing to endure all this for Christ? Remember that you have not attained unto the full meaning of this prayer until you have said, “Yes,” to all that it means. And until you can go to the

uttermost lengths to which God's providence may go, you have not gone to the full extent of the resignation in this cry of our Lord.

Many of the early Christians, I think, did know this prayer by heart—it is wonderful how willing they were to do anything and be anything for Christ. They had got this idea into their heads that they were not to live to themselves—and they had it also in their hearts. And they believed that to be martyred was the highest honor they could possibly wish for.

Consequently, if they were brought to the tribunals of the judges, they never ran away from their persecutors. They almost courted death, for they thought it was the highest privilege that they could possibly have if they might be torn in pieces by the lions in the arena, or be decapitated with the sword. Now, if we could but get that idea into our hearts, with what courage would it gird us, how fully might we then serve God, and how patiently might we endure persecution if we had but learnt the meaning of this prayer, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

II. In the second place, I AM TO TRY AND GIVE YOU SOME REASONS WHY IT WILL BE BEST FOR US ALL TO SEEK TO HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN US, SO THAT WE MAY BE BROUGHT INTO THIS FRAME OF MIND AND HEART.

And the first reason is because it is simply *a matter of right*. God ought to have His way at all times and I ought not to have mine whenever it is contrary to His. If ever my will is at cross purposes to the will of the Supreme, it is but right that mine should yield to His. If I could have my own way—if such a poor, feeble creature as I am could thwart the Omnipotent Creator, it would be wrong for me to do it.

What! Has He made me, and shall He not do as He wills with me? Is He like the potter and am I but as the clay, and shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, “Why hast thou made me thus?” No, my Lord, it is but right that You should do what You please with me, for I am Yours—Yours, for You have made me—Yours, for You have bought me with Your blood.

If I am a jewel purchased with the precious blood of Jesus, then He may cut me into what shape He pleases, He may polish me as He chooses, He may let me lie in the darkness of the casket, or let me glitter in His hand or in His diadem. In fact, He may do with me just as He wills, for I am His, and so long as I know that He does it, I must say, “Whatever He does is right. My will shall not be in opposition to His will.”

But again, this is not only a matter of right, *it is a matter of wisdom with us*. Depend upon it, dear brethren, if we could have our own will, it would often be the worst thing in the world for us. But to let God have His way with us, even if it were in our power to thwart Him—would be an act of wisdom on our part.

What do I desire when I wish to have my own will? I desire my own happiness. Well, I shall get it far more easily if I let God have His will, for the will of God is both for His own glory and my happiness. So, however much I may think that my own will would tend to my comfort and happiness, I may rest assured that God's will would be infinitely more profitable to me than my own. And that, although God's will may seem to make it dark and dreary for me at the time, yet from seeming evil He will bring forth good, such as never could have been produced from that supposed good after which my weak and feeble judgment is so apt to run.

But again, suppose it were possible for us to have our own will, *would it not be an infringement of that loving reliance which Christ may well ask at our hands, that we should trust Him?* Are we not saved by trusting our Lord Jesus Christ? Has not faith in Christ been the means of saving me from sin and hell?

Then surely I must not run away from this rule when I come into positions of trial and difficulty. If faith has been superior to sin, through the blood of Christ, it will certainly be superior to trial, through the almighty arm of Christ. Did I not tell Him, when I first came to Him, that I would trust no one but Him? Did I not declare that all my other confidences were burst and broken, and scattered to the winds?

And did I not ask that He would permit me to put my trust in Him alone? And shall I, after that, play the traitor? Shall I now set up some other object in which to place my trust? Oh, no! My love to Jesus,

my gratitude to Him for His condescension in accepting my faith binds me henceforth to trust to Him, and to Him alone.

We often lose the force of a truth by not making it palpable to our own mind. Let us try to make this one so. Imagine the Lord Jesus to be visibly present in this pulpit. Suppose that He looks down upon one of you and says, "My child, your will and Mine do not, just now, agree. You desire such and such a thing, but I say, 'Nay, you must not have it.' Now, my child, which will is to prevail, Mine or yours?"

Suppose you were to reply, "Lord, I must have my will," do you not think He would look at you with eyes of infinite sadness and pity, and say to you, "What! Did I give up My will for you and will you not give up your will for Me? Did I surrender all I had, even My life, for your sake, and do you say, you self-willed child, 'I must have these things according to my will, and contrary to Your wish and purpose, O my Savior?'"

Surely you could not talk like that. Rather, I think I see you instantly falling on your knees and saying, "Lord Jesus, forgive me for ever harboring such evil thoughts. No, my Lord, even if Your will is hard, I will think it pleasant. If it be bitter, I will believe that the bitterest draught is sweet. Let me but see You dying on the cross for me, let me only know that You love me, and wherever You shall put me, I will be in heaven as long as I can feel that it is Your will that is being done with me. I will be perfectly content to be just wherever You choose me to be, and to suffer whatever You choose for me to endure."

Yes, dear friends, it would show a sad want of that love which we owe to Christ, and of that gratitude which He deserves, if we were once to set our wills up in opposition to His. Therefore, again, beloved, for love's sake, for wisdom's sake, for right's sake, I beseech you ask the Holy Spirit to teach you this prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to impart to you its blessed meaning.

III. I notice, in the next place, THE EFFECT OF TRULY SAYING AND FEELING, "NOT AS I WILL, BUT AS THOU WILT."

The first effect is, *constant happiness*. If you would find out the cause of most of your sorrows, dig at the root of your self-will, for that is where it lies. When your heart is wholly sanctified unto God and your will is entirely subdued to Him, the bitter becomes sweet, pain is changed to pleasure, and suffering is turned into joy. It is not possible for that man's mind to be disturbed whose will is wholly resigned to the will of God.

"Well," says one, "that is a very startling statement"—and another says, "I have really sought to have my will resigned to God's will, yet I am disturbed." Yes, and that is simply because, though you have sought, like all the rest of us, you have not yet attained to full resignation to the will of the Lord. But when once you have attained to it—I fear you never will in this life—then shall you be free from everything that shall cause you sorrow or discomposure of mind.

Another blessed effect of this prayer, if it is truly presented, is that *it will give a man holy courage and bravery*. If my mind is wholly resigned to God's will, what have I to fear in all the world? It is with me then as it was with Polycarp. When the Roman emperor threatened that he would banish him, he said, "Thou canst not, for the whole world is my Father's house, and thou canst not banish me from it." "But I will slay you," said the emperor. "Nay, thou canst not, for my life is hid with Christ in God."

"I will take away all your treasures." "Nay, thou canst not, for I have nothing that thou knowest of. My treasure is in heaven and my heart is there also." "But I will drive thee away from men and thou shalt have no friends left." "Nay, that thou canst not do, for I have a Friend in heaven from whom thou canst not separate me. I defy thee, for there is nothing that thou canst do to me."

And so can the Christian always say, if once his will agrees with God's will. He may defy all men and defy hell itself, for he will be able to say, "Nothing can happen to me that is contrary to the will of God, and if it be His will, it is my will, too. If it pleases God, it pleases me. God has been pleased to give me part of His will, so I am satisfied with whatever He sends."

Man is, after all, only the second cause of our sorrows. A persecutor says, perhaps, to a child of God, "I can afflict you." "No, you cannot, for you are dependent on the first Great Cause, and He and I are

agreed.” Ah, dear friends, there is nothing that makes men such cowards as having wills contrary to the will of God.

But when we resign ourselves wholly into the hands of God, what have we to fear? The thing that made Jacob a coward was that he was not resigned to God’s will when Esau came to meet him. God had foretold that the elder of the two sons of Isaac should serve the younger—Jacob’s business was to believe that and to go boldly forward with his wives and children—not to bow down before Esau, but to say, “The promise is, the elder shall serve the younger. I am not going to bow down to you—it is your place to fall prostrate before me.”

But poor Jacob said, “Perhaps it is God’s will that Esau should conquer me, and smite the mothers and their children. But my will is that it shall not be.” The contest is well-pictured at the ford Jabbok, but if Jacob had not disbelieved God’s promise, he would never have bowed himself to the earth seven times before his brother Esau. In the holy majesty of his faith, he would have said, “Esau, my brother, you can do me no hurt, for you can do nothing contrary to the will of God. You can do nothing contrary to His decree and I will be pleased with whatsoever it is.”

So, this resignation to God’s will gives, first, joy in the heart, and then it gives fearless courage. And yet another thing follows from it. As soon as anyone truly says, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt,” this resolve *tends to make every duty light, every trial easy, every tribulation sweet*. We should never feel it to be a hard thing to serve God, yet there are many people, who, if they do a little thing for the Lord, think so much of it. And if there is ever a great thing to be done, you have, first, to plead very hard to get them to do it—and when they do it, very often it is done so badly that you are half sorry you ever asked them to do it.

A great many people make very much out of what is really very little. They take one good action which they have performed and they hammer it out till it becomes as thin as gold leaf—and then they think they may cover a whole week with that one good deed. The seven days shall all be glorified by an action which only takes five minutes to perform. It shall be quite enough, they even think, for all time to come.

But the Christian, whose will is conformed to God’s will, says, “My Lord, is there anything else for me to do? Then, I will gladly do it. Does it involve want of rest? I will do it. Does it involve loss of time in my business? Does it involve me, sometimes, in toil and fatigue? Lord, it shall be done, if it is Your will, for Your will and mine are in complete agreement. If it is possible, I will do it, and I will count all things but loss that I may win Christ and be found in Him, rejoicing in His righteousness, and not in my own.”

IV. There are many other sweet and blessed effects which this resignation would produce, but I must close by observing that THE ONLY WAY IN WHICH THIS SPIRIT CAN BE ATTAINED IS BY THE UNCTION OF THE HOLY ONE, the outpouring and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

You may try to subdue your own self, but you will never do it alone. You may labor, by self-denial, to keep down your ambition, but you will find that it takes another shape and grows by that wherewith you thought to poison it. You may seek to concentrate all the love of your soul on Christ, and in the very act, you will find self creeping in.

I am sometimes astonished—and yet not astonished when I know the evil of my own heart—when I look within myself and find how impure my motive is at the very moment when I thought it was most pure. And I expect it is the same with you, dear friends. You perform a good action—some almsgiving to the poor, perhaps. You say, “I will do it very quietly.” Someone speaks of it and you say at once, “I wish you had not spoken of that. I do not like to hear anyone talk of what I have done. It hurts me.”

Perhaps it is only your pride that makes you say that it hurts you, for some folk make their modesty to be their pride. It is, in fact, their secret pride that they are doing good and that people do not know it. They glory in that supposed secrecy, and by its coming out, they feel that their modesty is spoilt and they are afraid that people will say, “Ah, you see that it is known what they do—they do not really do their good deeds in secret.”

So that even our modesty may be our pride—and what some people think their pride, may happen to be the will of God, and may be real modesty. It is very hard work to give up our own will, but it is possible, and that is one of the lessons we should learn from this text, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

Again, if there is anybody of whom you are a little envious—perhaps a minister who takes a little of the gloss off you by preaching better than you do, or a Sunday school teacher who is more successful in his work—make that particular person the object of your most constant prayer and endeavor as much as lies in you to increase that person’s popularity and success.

Someone asks, “But you cannot bring human nature up to that point, can you—to try and exalt one’s own rival?” My dear friends, you will never know the full meaning of this prayer till you have tried to do this—and actually sought to honor your rival more than yourself. That is the true spirit of the Gospel, “in honour preferring one another.” I have sometimes found it hard work, I must confess, but I have schooled myself down to it.

Can this be done? Yes, John the Baptist did it. He said of Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” If you had asked John whether he wished to increase, he would have said, “Well, I should like to have more disciples. Still, if it is the Lord’s will, I am quite content to go down, that Christ should go up.”

How important, therefore, it is for us to learn how we may attain to this state of acquiescence with our heavenly Father’s will! I have given you the reasons for it, but how can it be done? Only by the operation of the Spirit of God. As for flesh and blood, they will not help you in the least—they will just go the other way—and when you think that, surely, you have got flesh and blood under control, you will find that they have got the upper hand of you just when you thought you were conquering them.

Pray the Holy Spirit to abide with you, to dwell in you, to baptize you, to immerse you in His sacred influence, to cover you, to bury you in His sublime power, and so, and only so, when you are completely immersed in the Spirit and steeped, as it were, in the crimson sea of the Savior’s blood, shall you be made to fully realize the meaning of this great prayer, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

“Lord, not self, but Christ. Not my own glory, but Your glory. Not my aggrandizement, but Yours. Nay, not even my success, but Your success. Not the prosperity of my own church, or my own self, but the prosperity of Your church, the increase of Your glory—let all that be done as thou wilt, not as I will.”

How different this is from everything connected with the world! I have tried to take you up to a very high elevation and if you have been able to get up there, or even to desire to get up there, how striking has the contrast been between this spirit and the spirit of the worldling! I shall not say anything to those of you who are unconverted, except this—learn how contrary you are to what God would have you be and what you must be, ere you can enter the kingdom of heaven.

You know that you could not say, “Let God have His will,” and you also know that you could not humble yourself to become as a little child. This shows your deep depravity, so, may the Holy Spirit renew you, for you have need of renewing, that you may be made a new creature in Christ Jesus! May He sanctify you wholly, spirit, soul, and body, and at last present you, faultless before the throne of God, for His dear name’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JOHN 15:1-11

Verse 1. *I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.*

If you want to know where the true church is, Christ here tells you—“I am the true vine.” All who are in Christ are in the true church. If you want to know who is the Father of the church, its Keeper and Guardian, Christ here tells you—“My Father is the husbandman.” Hence, I feel persuaded that the true

vine, the church, will never die, for it is Christ. And I am also persuaded that it will never be uprooted, for Jesus says, “My Father is the husbandman.” And that fact is a guarantee that He will take care of it.

2. *Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away:*

In some sense, men and women may be in Christ by a mere outward profession. But if they have no evidence of a real union to Christ—if they produce no fruit—they will be taken away, some by death, and others by apostasy. But they will be taken away.

2. *And every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*

From these words, it is clear that many of the afflictions which we have to endure are not brought upon us because we are unfruitful, but because we are bearing fruit.

3-4. *Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*

Dear friends, beware of a Christless Christianity. Beware of trying to be Christians without living daily upon Christ. The branch may just as well try to bear fruit apart from the vine as for you to hope to maintain the reality of Christian life without continual fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

5-6. *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*

The vine must either bear fruit or be good for nothing, and you, believer, must be vitally united to Christ and bear fruit in consequence of that union or else you will be like those fruitless vine-branches, of which our Lord said that “men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.”

7. *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*

Do not take that verse as a promise of unlimited answers to prayer, for it is nothing of the kind. Remember the “if” that qualifies it—“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you,” for a man who is truly in Christ, as the branch is in the vine, and who is feeding upon Christ’s words, will be so influenced by the Holy Spirit that he will not ask anything which is contrary to the mind of God.

Consequently, his prayers, though in one sense unrestricted, are really restricted by the tenderness of his conscience and the sensitiveness of his spirit to the influence of the mind of God. There are some Christians who do not get their prayers answered and who never will as long as they do not comply with this condition, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you.”

If you do not take notice of Christ’s words, He will not take notice of your words. He is not going to open His door to every stranger who chooses to give a runaway knock at it, but He will pay attention to His own children who pay attention to Him.

8. *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*

“You shall be known to be My disciples.” Everybody will perceive that you must be branches of that fruitful vine, Christ Jesus, if you bear much fruit.

9. *As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*

How wondrously Jesus loves those who are truly His! As the Father loved Him, so does He love us—that is, without beginning, without measure, without variation, without end.

“Continue ye in my love.” That is—live in it, enjoy it, drink it in, be influenced by it.

10. *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love;*

“You shall live in the realization of My love if you live in obedience to Me.”

10-11. *Even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*

For, when Christ is not pleased with us, we are not likely to have joy in ourselves. Oh, that we may so live as to please Christ!

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.